

# State Charter School Commission starts to pack up

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**While supporters are raising money to keep the state's nine charter schools going through the school year, the state commission that oversees seven of them voted Wednesday to begin winding down.**

By [John Higgins](#)

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The [Washington State Charter School Commission](#) agreed in a hastily arranged conference call Wednesday to start closing shop — its first decision since the state Supreme Court declared the state's charter-school law [unconstitutional](#) Friday.

Advocates [promise to raise the estimated \\$14 million](#) needed to keep the state's nine existing charter schools open for the school year without public funding.

But the state commission that oversees seven of them in the Seattle-Tacoma area would no longer be necessary if the court's decision stands.

Commissioners empowered Executive Director Joshua Halsey to use his best judgment in winding down the independent state agency, [which was created](#) after voters narrowly approved charter schools in 2012.

They also agreed to ask the state Attorney General's Office to explore options that would allow the schools to finish the school year.

That would give the Legislature time to figure out a way to fund the schools — either in a special session or in its regular session in January.

They're not the only ones seeking guidance from Attorney General Bob Ferguson.

Gov. Jay Inslee hopes to meet with Ferguson later this week and "wants to do more outreach before he makes additional public comment," the governor's spokesman said Wednesday.

Ferguson declined an interview with The Seattle Times on Wednesday.

“In the charter-schools litigation, the Attorney General’s Office represents multiple state clients,” said spokesman Peter Lavallee. “Attorney General Ferguson and his team are in active consultation with those clients, who are asking us for legal advice and options.”

Lavallee said Wednesday that while those clients may talk about those discussions, Ferguson is “ethically and professionally bound to keep our advice confidential at this stage.”

After 10 months of deliberation, the Washington Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that charter schools weren’t entitled to funds exclusively intended for “common schools” and couldn’t tap the general fund, either, because the state can’t tell which dollars come from which sources.

The dissenting justices argued that the state’s general fund could be used for charter schools because the 2012 law did not specify where the money should come from to pay for them.

Ferguson and the other parties in the case have 20 days to ask the court to reconsider before it’s sent back to the King County Superior Court where it was originally filed for “an appropriate order.”

The state commission awards and monitors charter agreements with nonprofit organizations seeking to open them in the state.

The Spokane School District also has that power and has approved two charter schools, which opened in August.

In addition to the schools already in operation, the commission has approved three more schools to open in 2016, two in Seattle and one in Walla Walla.

Meanwhile, charter-school supporters have planned rallies Thursday and Friday in Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane and Walla Walla.

The commission will hold its regular meeting on Sept. 16 in Tacoma.

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